

LIVING IN BETWEEN BEING ‘COLONIZED’ AND ‘POSTCOLONIZED’: A POSTCOLONIAL ANALYSIS OF *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

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ABSTRACT

*After two hundred years of tyranny, the British has left the subcontinent divided geographically and its people culturally as well as psychologically. This long term’s dominance has created two groups; one who has internalized the British ideology and the other who has rejected everything related to the British. The intense antagonistic attitude to the British has led that group of people to become relatively obstinate in terms of accepting anything (idea or commodity) from the West. These two types of perceptions have been fostered and transmitted from generation to generation among the subcontinent people. Falling between this ambivalent context, the generation who has not been directly under British dominance faces a challenge to construct a static identity. This struggle progressively produces a vacuum feeling-a sense of loss that is transmitted from generation to generation. This paper approaches a postcolonial reading of *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai to explore how colonial influence challenges the descendants of the colonized ones regarding establishing a secure cultural, linguistic and national identity.*

KEYWORDS: Identity, Colonial Influence, Transmitted, Loss, Generation & Postcolonial

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INTRODUCTION

History and effect of colonialism has occupied a remarkable place in the history of civilization. More or less almost every country is experienced in dealing with the effect of colonization either as colonizer or as colonized one. India is included in the later group. Due to the long term existence of the colonizers in the sub continent, different types of mind-sets of the descendants towards the West are observed. One group of people is obsessed with westernizing themselves whereas another group possesses a complete antagonistic attitude to the West. Psychological subjugation to the West responsibly establishes a kind of superiority complex among the people. This group of people is still ‘colonized’, culturally and psychologically, after many decades of decolonization. In contrast, because of the history of two hundred years’ oppression, the people who have been nurturing a confronting notion to the British, widely to the West, can be addressed as ‘postcolonized’. These people are still in the confinement established and left by the British colonizers. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Kiran Desai portrays such characters who struggle immensely to survive in this ambivalent situation where the challenges are intense to construct an identity. The sense of loss is transmitted from generation after generation that leads to the identity crisis- cultural, linguistic and to some extends national as well. Desai is successful in exposing the dilemma where people are living in between being ‘colonized’ and ‘postcolonized.’ The main purpose of this article is to explain how this kind of predicament is constructed through the extreme positive or negative responses to the British ideology and the inevitable consequences of it.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE DIVERSE ATTITUDES

Though the term ‘colonized’ is easily comprehended, the term ‘postcolonized’ requires an explanation. This term is closely related to ‘postcolonialism’. Explaining ‘postcolonialism’ John McLeod, in *Beginning Postcolonialism* specifies:

The term ‘postcolonialism’ recognizes both historical continuity and change. On the other hand, it acknowledges that the material realities and modes of representation common to colonialism are still very much with us today. Even if the political map of the world has changed through decolonization. (33)

According to McLeod, postcolonialism, as it is observed, throws the challenge to colonial ways of thinking and knowing, exposing the politics of formulating ‘knowledge’ and ‘culture’. Unfortunately, the colonial ways of knowing still pervades and have a very strong affiliation with the formulation of knowledge, culture and ideology. Though the Empire has been declined long time ago, the British impact on the colonized people is indisputable and intense. As postcolonialism recognizes historical continuity and change, the people who have experienced colonization and their descendants respectively possess diverse attitudes to the British/the West. Some people may found obsessed with the superiority of the British as they used to occupy the position of power during colonial rule. They nurture, develop and sustain this approach throughout their lives; even after the complete declination of the Empire. They are the ‘colonized’ ones. Contrarily, there has been the presence of a group of people who used to be devoid of exercising the power during the colonial era. This deprivation along with the exploitation by the colonizers created a very strong sense of repulsion among this group of people to the West. The very strong sense of resentment continues even after the decolonization and most significantly is disseminated among the descendants of that group of people. They are the ‘postcolonized’ ones. These people blindly deny anything and everything related to the process of colonization, broadly to the West.

Representation of the West and the East also plays a very significant role in determining of these diverse attitudes. This type of representation which is known as ‘Orientalism’ provides the scope to focus on the superiority of the West by positioning the East as inferior ones. John McLeod explains in *Beginning Postcolonialism*:

Orientalism constructs binary divisions. The Orient is frequently described in a series of negative terms that serves two butters a sense of the West’s superiority and strength. If the West is assumed as the seat of knowledge and learning, then it will follow that the Orient is the place of ignorant and naivety. The West occupies a superior rank while the Orient is its ‘other’, in a subservient position. (40–41)

In Key Concept in Post-Colonial Studies, it is asserted that the significance of Orientalism lies in the base of knowing the ‘other’. From the authoritative perspective Orientalism explains the relationship between the Occident and the Orient which is built on power, domination and varying degrees of a complex hegemony (168). Hegemony is important because the capability to dominate the thinking of the colonized is by far the most effective strategy of imperial power in colonized region.

Consent is achieved by the interpellation of the colonized subject by imperial discourse so that Euro- centric values, assumptions, beliefs and attitudes are accepted as a matter of course as the most natural or valuable. The inevitable consequence of such interpellation is that the colonized subject understands itself as peripheral to those Euro-centric values, while at the same time accepting their centrality.

(Ashcroft et al. 116–117)

Realizing and internalizing imperial discourse, the colonized people tend to approach to the center by imitating different aspects of life of their colonizers. This attitude is known as mimicry. Because of this strong internalization of the imperial discourse, mimicry evokes the colonized ones to copy the master so accurately that they have to suppress their own identity. Most of the time mimicry leads the colonized people to be confused regarding their own identity under the strong domination of the foreign culture and ideology.

“Mimicry has often been an overt goal of imperial policy. For instance, Lord Macaulay’s 1835 Minute to Parliament derided Oriental learning, and advocated the reproduction of English art and learning in India”

(Ashcroft et al.139–140).

In the Minute on Indian Education, Lord Macaulay brings the idea of ‘gentleman’ that has a close connection to the idea of mimicry. He emphasizes on the importance of being a person who will be Indian in blood and color but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. So, being ‘gentlemen’ and accessing power like the masters (the colonizers) finds its way through mimicry.

Idea of nationalism and anti colonial nationalism strengthens the ‘postcolonized’ attitude among the people. Intense sense of belongingness to the place, land and home assists the colonized people to be organized for the anti colonial movement. Simultaneously this urge for decolonizing the country develops a profound abhorrence to the colonizers. This repulsiveness is so powerful and deep into the minds of the oppressed people that it is transferred from generation to generation remaining unchanged. While nationalism boosts ‘postcolonized’ attitude, neo-colonialism inspires people to embrace colonial ideology, though indirectly. In Key Concepts of Post-Colonial Studies it is stated that “(I)n a wider sense the term(neo-colonialism) has come to signify the inability of so called third world economics to develop an independent economic and political identity” (162). Emphasizing the politics and consequences of neo-colonialism McLeod clarifies

The newly-independent nation can find itself administered by an indigenous middle class that uses its privileged education and position cheerfully to replicate the colonial administration of the nation for its own financial profit. The new administration does little to transform the nation economically. Instead it makes the new nation economically subservient to the old colonial Western powers by allowing big foreign companies to establish themselves in the new nation, A nation that remains economically dependent on the West and treats its people in this way, cannot call itself truly free from colonialism(89–90).

In these long and complicated ways diverse attitudes towards the British/the West have been constructed gradually among the people who have experienced the colonial rule as colonized ones.

DIVERGENT BACKGROUND OF THE CHARACTERS

In *The Inheritance of Loss* Kiran Desai portrays a number of characters from different background who belong to the northern parts of India. Background along with their association to the past history of colonization of the subcontinent divides them into two major groups. Both of the groups are still strongly influenced by the colonizers’ institution, culture, philosophy and the life style. In this novel, the characters like the judge, the cook, Noni and Lola, Gyan and the Nepali Gorkhas response to the western ideology either positively or negatively. Some of them are quite motivated by the influence of ‘the superior British people’ whereas others possess a very strong sense of nationalism and are stimulated to express their utmost hatred to the British people. As a result, the later ones reject and revolt against anything and everything even that has the least relation with the West.

The judge, Cambridge educated anglophine retired judge, lives in the town of Kalimpong. Throughout his life, he tries to overcome his inferiority complex to the British. From his childhood he has been brought up in such an environment which incites him to develop a hegemonic attitude to the colonizers. In his mission school there was a portrait of Queen Victoria in a dress like a flouncy curtain, a fringed cape, and a peculiar hat with feathery arrows shooting out. Each morning as Jemubhai passed under, he found her froggy expression compelling and felt deeply impressed that a woman so plain would also have been so powerful. The more he pondered this oddity, the more his respect for her and the English grew (Desai 58).

This superior representation of the British has been so imbedded in him that his subconscious mind develops an inferiority complex that always instigates him to envy the British and hate the Indians. During his higher study, through the meticulous mimicking of the British people's life style and culture along with the accent, Jemubhai (the judge) successfully internalizes the British ideology. This ideology accompanies him when he returns to India. The judge was desperate to westernize his wife, Nimmi, by appointing a governess who is supposed to teach her English and behave like a British. Jemubhai, who is a victim of colonialism, remains colonized in the rest of his life by continuing to follow the western ideology. Macaulay's 'Minute on Education Act' attempted to make a class of persons, Indian in blood and color but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. Jamubhai, from an individual level, fulfills this aim by internalizing the western beliefs, norms and values. After being educated by western education the judge is found as "[t]he man with the white curly Wig and a dark face covered in powder, bringing down hammer, always against the native, in a world that was still colonial" (205). Jemubhai goes through a transformation of being a westernized Indian who finds "India was too messy for justice: it ended only in humiliation for the person in authority. He had done his duty as far as it was any citizen's duty to report problems to the police, and it was no longer his responsibility" (264). He leads his entire life being 'colonized' culturally and psychologically, even after the decolonization of India.

Unlike the judge, the cook, in this novel, cannot think the Indian people equal to the British or the western ones. He has also internalized the essence of the Other, the superiority of the West. As a person of having colonial experience, he is obsessed with the prosperity of the West. The cook is preoccupied with the idea "[t]he west occupies a superior rank while the Orient is its 'others', in a subservient position" (McLeod 41). His vision of the West is like a dreamland. According to him, whatever is related to the foreign countries, outside India, offers the best service. He thinks, "murgamurgi.. They were a foreign breed and hen laid more eggs than any other murgi I have known" (Desai 60). The cook boastfully shows the letter everyone, sent by his son, Biju, reporting that "[h]e works for the Americans...cooking English food, he had a higher position than if he were cooking Indian" (17). After many years of decolonization, the cook is immensely preoccupied with the representation of the West and the East delivered through the imperial discourse. For him, thinking otherwise about the master-slave relationship as colonizers-colonized ones is beyond imagination.

Noni and Lola, two sisters live at Mon Ami, nearby the judge's residence, Cho Oyu, lead a western life living in the heart of eastern part of the world. These sisters are the privileged ones in that locality where the majority live under the poverty line. In that place they regularly take trip to England to buy necessary things. When Lola returns to Kalimpong from England visiting her daughter, Pixie, her suitcases are "stuffed with Marmite, Oxo bullion cubes, Knorr soup packets, After Eights, daffodil bulbs and renewed supplies of Boots, cucumber lotion and Marks and Spencer underwear- the essence, quintessence, of Englishness as she understood it" (46-47). In the place like Kalimpong, they manage to maintain the high standard of their life style. Their house is decorated with roses. They grew English Broccolis in their yard. Their

cupboard is filled with Wedgwood cups and plates. They buy their ornaments from England for attending the occasion like Christmas. They are "little trolls, and elf shoe makers that were stored the rest of the year inside a Bata shoe box up in the attic along with the story of the English ghost in a flouncy nighty" (153). The bakers arrive every afternoon with a trunk that was scuffed outside but "inside it glowed like a treasure chest, with switch rolls, queen cakes, peanut butter cookies evocative of, the ladies thought, cartoon America: gosh, golly, gee whiz, jeepers creepers" (66). Lola is a widow with a daughter and Noni is single. They are too much pessimistic regarding the future of India to let their descendants stay here. Lola is proud of her daughter who is a BBC reporter. Her advice to her daughter is "[b]etter leave sooner rather than later India is a sinking ship. Don't to be pushy, darling sweetie thinking of your happiness only but the doors owned stay open forever." (47). Although they are the citizens of independent India, they are still economically colonized. They are contributing one way or another to continue neo-colonialism in India. They are representing those people in India who have been able to grab the benefit from the British influence. These people are also the 'colonized' ones, though in a different and indirect way.

Gyan, the descendant of a Nepali Gorkha merchant, belongs to a complete different economic, cultural and psychological background. His relation with Sai is interrupted because of his sudden psychological transformation after joining GNLF (Gorkha National Liberation Front). When he marches with the members of GNLF for the first, he remembers: the stirring stories of when citizens had risen up in their millions and demanded that the British leave. There was the nobility of it, the daring of it, and the glorious fire of it- "India for Indians. No taxation without representation. No help for the wars. Not a man, not a rupee. British Raj Murdabad!" If a nation had such a climax in its history, its heart, would it not hunger for it again? (158)

Gyan starts to congest his mind with anti-colonial discourses. His lover, Sai, and other acquaintances begin to appear almost obnoxious to him. His subconscious mind gradually internalizes 'anti-west' approach from being 'anti-colonial' one. Being arrogant to his lover who loves to lead her life like the western people, Gyan shouts:

I am not interested in Christmas!. Why do you celebrate Christmas? You are Hindus and you don't celebrate Id or Guru Nanak's birthday or even Durga Puja or Dussehra or Tibetan New Year.. You are like slaves, that's why you are, running after the West, embarrassing yourself. It's because of people like you we never get anywhere. (163)

After joining GNLF, he begins to observe and criticize everything from a different perspective. Though Gyan feels sorry for Sai, he cannot resist sharpening his hatred towards her when he evaluates Sai as a westernized Indian. Being infuriated at Sai, Gyan ejects his grudge to the West and accuses her severely:

Don't you have any pride? Trying to be so westernized. They don't want you!!! Go there and see if they will welcome you with open arms. You will be trying to clean their toilets and even then they won't want you (174).

The history of Gyan's ancestors also inspires him to be more aggressive to the West. His revulsion goes to the extreme level from where he cannot think even neutrally. His disagreement on Uncle Booty's departure from Kalimpong is:

Should Nepalis sit miserably for another two hundred years so the police don't have an excuse to throw out Father Booty? who needs Swiss people here? For how many thousands of years have we produced our own milk?. We live in India, thank you very much. We don't want any cheese.... I see, Swiss Luxury sets a standard. Yes, shoot your guilty conscious, stupid little girl, and hope someone doesn't burn down your house for the simple reason that you are a fool. (258)

There is nothing that can minimize his abhorrence to the West. With the misinterpretation of the idea of nationalism, Gyan reacts as a 'postcolonized' one who cannot justify any issue properly related to the West.

Gyan's transformed attitude is occurred by the provocation of the members of GNLF. In the north-eastern Himalayas the Gorkhas had been long neglected and had always remained at the periphery of society. The novel begins with the dissatisfaction of the Gorkhas. The members of GNLF, come to Cho Oyu to take away the judge's rifle and gun. This insurgency is introduced as:

In Kalimpong, high in the northeastern Himalayas where they lived-the retired judge and his cook, Sai and Mutt- there was a report of new dissatisfaction in the hills, gathering insurgency, men and guns. It was the Indian-Nepalese this time, fed up with being treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority. They wanted their own country, for at least their own state, in which to manage their own affairs (9).

This discontent increases day by day among the young Nepali Gorkhas.

Then one day fifty boys, members of the youth wing GNLF, gathered to swear an oath at Mahakaldara to fight to the death for the formation of a homeland, Gorkhaland. They waved their unsheathed kukris, sliced the fierce blades through the tender mist under the watery sun. Quite suddenly, everyone was using the word insurgency (126).

They demand Gorkhaland with proper justification. They claim:

We are solders, loyal, brave. India or England, they never had cause to doubt our loyalty...Our character has never been in doubt. And have we been rewarded?? Have we been given compensation?? Are we given respect?? "No! They spit on us." We must fight, brothers and sisters, to manage our own affairs. This is where we were born, where our parents were born, where our grandparents were born. We will run our own affairs in our own language. If necessary, we will wash our bloody kukris in the mother waters of the Teesta. Jai Gorkha. (158-159).

After the speech, being highly inspired by connecting themselves with the history of their ancestors where nothing but oppression and humiliation is found and recorded, they discovered themselves in a world of fury and repugnance. As a consequence, they:

Found the hate pure, purer than it could ever have been before, because the grief of therpsst ha gone. Just the fury remained, distilled, liberating. It was their birthright, it could take them so high, it was a drug. They sat feeling elevated, the on the narrow wood benches (161).

This dissatisfaction results some evils in the society. Without anything serious Father Booty, a Swiss national, becomes the victim of insurgency. It is found that Father Booti is:

Residing in India illegally he had not expected contact with the authorities; he had allowed his residence permit to lapse in the back of a moldy drawer to renew the permit was bureaucratic hell, and never again did he plan to leave or to reenter India. He knew he was a foreigner bur had lost the notion that he was anything but an Indian foreigner (220).

Though he tries his best to protect his property in Kalimpong but his argument becomes hollow for the misled Nepali Gorkhas who have already begin to construct an antagonistic attitude towards the West. Consequently, Noni and Lola also feel threaten to live at their own place, Mon Ami (French name).

Their dissatisfaction also touches the judge and even his dog, Mutt, a foreign breed. Eventually, it is clear that the hatred of Nepali Gorkhas for the Indians is distorted into a total unacceptable behavior to the people or anything that is related to the West or the British.

DILEMMA IN IDENTITY FORMATION

Analyzing the title of the novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, it is assumed that the theme of the novel is the sense of loss and the way it is transmitted from one generation to another. Almost all the characters of this novel are seen in a perpetual struggle to form an identity throughout their life. Crisis of cultural, national and linguistics identity preoccupies their life. India has long been a colony of British Empire and its history shows the impact of colonial power. After many years of decolonization, people who belong to an ex-colonial community cannot break the shackle of the cultural, national and linguistics domination of the colonizers.

In a thesis paper, titled 'Multiple Identities and Translation Challenges in *The Inheritance of Loss*,' Thea Meinema categorizes the various identities that the characters want to develop. In order to explain the challenges for the formulation of cultural identity, Thea focuses on the problems that Sai faces as a "Westernized Indian". Thea states that Sai had learned "cake was better than *laddoos*, fork spoon knife better than hands, sipping the blood of Christ and consuming a wafer of his body was more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds. English was better than Hindi" (Desai 23). In spite of being an Indian by born, Sai's ideology has been molded following the Western pattern of living style. Living in a *desi* environment, Sai is being brought up by her grandfather, the judge, who has always been possessing a 'colonized' mind. As a result, whatever is learnt by Sai through study and surroundings is divided into being superior and inferior contents. Moreover, snobbish people around her like Father Booty, two Anglophone sisters, Uncle Potty influence to undervalue the very 'Indianness'. Because of this division and influence, a dilemma is born in Sai's mind regarding her fixed identity. She retreats gradually from respecting her culture, language and natives. Eventually, this perspective connects itself with the loss of love from both sides, Sai and Gyan, because of the same level of understanding as well as inconsideration. Sai finds herself as a secluded person who is looking for a specific definition of identity for her.

Living one country and possessing the ideology of another country also welcomes cultural identity crisis for Noni and Lola. These two sisters are entirely influenced by the supremacy of the West. Their distinctive life style captures local attention that drives them to become suspects to the rebels. A total bewilderment numbs them when they come from the *Pradhan's* place being rejected and humiliated in response to their complaints against the GNLF. They feel the emptiness deep inside their mind for the first time when they realized that just because of having different ideology and leading life in a different style they are going to be uprooted. They cannot consider themselves as the westerns nor can they develop a fellow feeling with the local people in Kalimpong. Their 'colonized' mind leads them to such a state from where they cannot determine their own identity, culturally as well as psychologically.

Crisis of national identity can be identified as one of the major themes of this novel. In an essay, titled 'Nationalism in Transnational Space: A Saga of Conflict in *The Inheritance of Loss*' Nibedita Mukherjee mentions, "All these men-the Judge, Biju and Gyan-attempt to be established through the process of migration and suffer the varied aspects of 'unhomeliness' and ultimately embark upon a voyage in search of 'homely space'. This struggle reaches to its height when the whole community involves in this endeavor. The Nepali Gorkhas want their country, or at least their won state, in which to manage their own affairs" (Desai 9). The Gorkhas have been neglected for a long time. Nibedita explains:

This age-old neglect had slept dormant in their heart and under impact of slight disturbances had erupted into a destructive insurgency. The result was disruption of normal life and destruction at large:

A series of strikes kept business closed.

A one day strike.

A three-day strike.

Then a seven day.

A thirty-day strike.

A twenty-one day strike

More strike than no-strike. (235)

This obviously reflects the 'regressive' nationalism of the East. This struggle for national identity incites the inner anger of the people whose ancestors have been oppressed by the West, the colonizers. Their strong claim for an independent nation cannot provide them an identity. Their behavior and activities welcome the deterioration of the community they belong instead of its development.

Roadblocks stopped traffic, prevented timber and stone tracks from leaving, halted tea from being transported. Nails were scattered on the road, Mobil oil spilled all about. The GNLF boys charged large sums of money if they let you through at all and coerced you to buy GNLF speeches on cassettes tapes and Gorkhaland calendars (Desai 236).

This struggle converts the noble mission into the mission of taking revenge. "This was the time to make anyone you did not like disappear, to avenge ancient family vendettas" (294). This invigorating sense of nationalism also transforms Gyan as his ancestors were at the service of the British. When he meets the members of GNLF, a new kind of feeling derives in his mind. He tries to justify everything from the perspective of a tendentious person. Unfortunately this emotion evaporates away soon. Progressively, Gyan's epiphany enlightens him to discern the accurate essence of nationalism. At the end of the novel, Gyan is found in a confused state searching for his established and recognized identity like Sai.

Because of the extreme responses to the colonial discourses, characters suffer vigorously in this novel. The judge has been avoided by his fellow students in aboard during his academic career. Consequently, he fails to establish himself there as a recognized one, more specifically as a British one. This failure introduces him with self hatred. This psychological crisis resists him to respect his country and religion as well. At the end of the novel, he is found with a profound sense of loss; a loss of cultural and national identity. His children, who he has sent to abroad underestimating own education, culture and identity related to India, also struggle to determine their fixed identity. Similarly, his granddaughter, Sai also experiences this psychological crisis, a dilemma to establish herself as an Indian. On the contrary, Gyan, the descendants of the ex-colonized people, is in the perpetual struggle to find his own place in the society.

CONCLUSIONS

In the novel, it has been depicted that how different characters from the different economic-socio-cultural background struggle to establish their own identity. For being the part of colonial history, this approach of identity construction appears

more complicated and longer. In the post-colonial era, history of oppression and parallel attraction by the neo-colonial economic privileges lead the people in an ambivalent situation; possessing either a 'postcolonized' mind or a 'colonized' mind. Extreme responses to the colonial discourses along with the misrepresentation of the east and west are responsible for this type of ideological construction. In this novel, characters who belong to a post-colonial period in an ex-colony live in between being 'colonized' and 'postcolonized' because of the intense influence of colonization. This predicament ultimately produces a vacuum feeling for them because of not identifying themselves to possess a fixed identity. Perpetually this hollow feeling—a sense of loss is transmitted from generation to generation, inherently indeed.

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